


The framing discourses of 'Honorary white' in the anti-apartheid movement in Japan

著者	Makino Kumiko
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Kumiko MAKINO*

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Abstract

International and transnational solidarity is being increasingly recognized as an indispensable part in the recent historiography on the liberation struggle in Southern Africa. Yet the literature has mostly focused on anti-apartheid movements in the West, and anti-apartheid movements in Asia have attracted little attention. Focusing on the Japanese citizens' movement (*shimin undo*) against apartheid, which loosely coalesced into the Japan Anti-Apartheid Committee (JAAC), this paper looks into how the issue of 'honorary white' was brought into the early period of the anti-apartheid movement in Japan, and how the framing discourses of the movement was developed around the issue.

Keywords: anti-apartheid, honorary white, international solidarity, Japan, South Africa

JEL classification: F50

* Associate Senior Research Fellow, African Studies Group, Area Studies Center, IDE (Kumiko_Makino@ide.go.jp)

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INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPING ECONOMIES (IDE), JETRO
3-2-2, WAKABA, MIHAMA-KU, CHIBA-SHI
CHIBA 261-8545, JAPAN

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The Framing Discourses of 'Honorary White' in the Anti-Apartheid Movement in Japan¹

Kumiko Makino

Introduction

International and transnational solidarity is being increasingly recognized as an indispensable part in the recent historiography on the liberation struggle in Southern Africa. Of the six volumes that have been published as the series 'Road to Democracy in South Africa', compiled by the South African Democracy Education Trust, volume 3 (parts 1 & 2) and volume 5 (parts 1 & 2) are dedicated to 'international solidarity' and 'African solidarity', respectively (SADET 2008; 2013). In addition to bringing a sense of community among solidarity activists beyond borders, the transnational anti-apartheid movement has also been argued to have contributed to the construction of a global civil society (Thorn 2006, 203).

While many other books and articles have been written on the topic (Jennet 1987; Culverson 1996; Sellstrom 1999; 2002; Fieldhouse 2005; Saunders 2010; Sapire and Saunders 2013), the literature has mostly focused on anti-apartheid movements in the West, therefore it does not reflect the 'truly global nature' of the solidarity movement (Brock et al. 2014, 2). In particular,

¹ This paper is the product of a series of interviews with people who have engaged in anti-apartheid and other activities for anti-discrimination/human rights causes. I would like to thank all those citizen activists who agreed to be interviewed. I cannot name all the people who generally shared their experiences, but my particular thanks go to Prof. Akira Kusuha and Keiji Shimogaki, who, in addition to the interviews, let me use their personal archives of newsletters and other documents of the Japan Anti-Apartheid Committee. Most of the interviews were conducted jointly by the author and Ms. Naoko Tsuyama, to whom I would like to express my sincere appreciation for continuous support and engagement in this research project. An earlier draft of this paper, titled "The Anti-apartheid Movement in Japan: The Origin and Effect of Its Framing Discourses of 'Honorary White'," was presented at the conference 'AFRICA-ASIA: A New Axis of Knowledge' in Accra, Ghana, 24-26 September 2015. I would like to thank Prof. Kweku Ampiah for giving me the opportunity to present the paper at the conference. The research project is supported by JSPS Kakenhi Grant Number 26380227.

anti-apartheid movements in Asia have attracted little attention, with the exception of India due to its deep historical connection with South African, including the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi.

This paper focuses on the Japanese citizens' movement (*shimin undo* in Japanese, its meaning discussed later) against apartheid, which loosely coalesced into the Japan Anti-Apartheid Committee (JAAC). The JAAC was not the sole actor in anti-apartheid international solidarity from Japan,² yet it is worth special attention as it had the longest history in Japan with continuous engagement in issues of apartheid and Southern African liberation. Its activism started in the 1960s and continued until the demise of the apartheid regime in the 1990s. With the exception of Morikawa's work on Africa–Japan relations (Morikawa 1988; 1997), few scholarly studies have touched on the topic. While the existing analysis on South Africa–Japan relations tends to focus for legitimate reasons on government and business and their shared interest in strategic minerals (Morikawa 1988; 1997; Ampiah 1997; Alden and Hirano 2003; Cornelissen 2004), this study sheds light on a neglected side of the transnational relations involving the two nations.

In previous papers, the author has presented a historical outline of the anti-apartheid movement in Japan (Makino 2011, 2014a, 2014b), yet they did not accompany an in-depth analysis of its characteristic focus on the issue of 'honorary white.' This paper looks into how the issue of 'honorary white' was brought into the early period of the anti-apartheid movement in Japan, and how the framing discourses of the movement were developed around the issue. The rest of the paper will be organised as follows. In the next section, a brief explanation of the historical development of the JAAC will be presented. This will be followed by discussion of how the characteristic discourses of the JAAC to frame apartheid as 'our own problem', derived from its focus on the issue of 'honorary white', was shaped. Finally, the paper concludes with reflections from a comparative perspective, i.e. the particularity of the JAAC in the transnational network of anti-apartheid solidarity movement.

² In particular, the Apartheid Non! International Arts Festival in 1988-1990 and the tour of the Amandla Cultural Ensemble in 1990 were very important in terms of scale of mobilization for events with anti-apartheid messages. The Apartheid Non! International Arts Festival was held in 194 venues and mobilized as many as 380,000 people in total all over Japan; the Amandla gave public performances in 27 cities and the number of audiences was about 70,000. See Makino (2014a, 7-9).

The Japan Anti-Apartheid Committee: Its Origin, Development, and Achievements

Kanjiro Noma, a Japanese editor and journalist, was the founder and often called ‘Father’ (Kusuhara 2015, 9) of the anti-apartheid movement in Japan. After working as an editor at several publishing establishments, including the liberal Iwanami Shoten, he became interested in the African peoples’ nationalist struggle for independence and translated several books written by African nationalist leaders, such as Kwame Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta.

It was at the third conference of the Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) in Moshi (then Tanganyika), in February 1963, when Noma first met exiled leaders of the African National Congress (ANC). Noma, together with other representatives from Japan, including Toshio Tanaka, MP (Japanese Socialist Party), met with representatives of the ANC, including Oliver Tambo and Moses Kotane. This was when the ANC and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) had recently been banned in South Africa after the Sharpeville massacre, and the exiled leaders started to seek external presence (Bundy 2013, 214).

Later that year, in August 1963, Mzwandile Piliso visited Hiroshima to attend the ninth meeting of the World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs. This was the first time a South African freedom fighter had visited Japan. He was interviewed by several Japanese media, and he called on Japanese citizens to stand up against apartheid (Noma 1969, 383; Kusuhara 1981, 69). Following those encounters, Noma, Tanaka, and several other Japanese representatives at the Moshi conference set up the JAAC (*Nan’a Jinshu Sabetsu Hantai Jikko Inikai* in Japanese, meaning Working Committee against Racial Discrimination in South Africa) and in December 1963, handed a protest letter to Foreign Minister Masayoshi Ohira on the Japanese government’s attitude and behaviour towards apartheid in South Africa.

The JAAC was initially organized within the Japan Asia Africa Solidarity Committee (Japan AA, which would later become the Japan Asia Africa Latin America Solidarity Committee or Japan AALA), which had informal but close relations with the Japanese Communist Party. Its formation took place in the context of broad leftist mobilization against the United States–Japan security treaty, which incorporated Japan into the Western bloc during the Cold War.

However, the JAAC soon became divided and defunct due to the split between leftist political forces induced by the Sino–Soviet confrontation. Thereafter, Noma decided to restart

the JAAC as a *shimin undo* (citizens' movement), which was named the *Minami Afurika Mondai Konwakai* (Discussion Group on South African Issues, later renamed the Discussion Group on African Issues) (Morikawa 1988, 203–204). *Shimin undo* is generally understood by its participants as collective actions for social change, which non-partisan citizens voluntarily and autonomously organize without guidance from existing political parties and movements (Michiba 2006–2007). Participants were free to come and go, and differences in opinions and ideologies among the participants were accepted and respected. *Betonamu ni Heiwa wo! Shimin Rengo* (or *Beheiren*, Japanese Committee 'Peace for Vietnam') is regarded as the most typical *shimin undo*, which influenced the style of the anti-apartheid citizens' movement.

In 1967, Noma visited the UK, France and Tanzania to gather information and to build solidarity relations with the liberation movements and their supporters. After returning to Japan, Noma published *Sabetsu to Hangyaku no Genten: Aparutoheito no Kuni* (Origin of Discrimination and Defiance: Apartheid Country), which was a critical milestone in the history of the Japanese anti-apartheid movement. The publisher Riron-sha, which issued the book, also began publication of a journal titled *Afurika wo Manabu Zasshi 'a'* (a: Journal for African Studies) in 1970. Since most Japanese people only read Japanese, publishing information in the Japanese language was an important tool for the movement to raise awareness among the Japanese public about the situation in South Africa and other African colonies and newly independent countries.

Noma passed away in 1975 from illness, but a younger generation of students and citizens who were regular participants in his study meetings continued the anti-apartheid activities. In Tokyo, *Afurika Kodo Inkai* (Africa Action Committee), or JAAC Tokyo, had been formed in May 1969, and at the end of 1970 in Osaka, another group named *Komurado Afurika Inkai* (Comrade Africa Committee), or JAAC Osaka, was established. Citizens' movements against apartheid were also organized in other cities, including Shizuoka (formed in 1977), Kyoto (1980), Nagoya (1985), Hiroshima (1986), Kumamoto (1986), Matsudo (1986), Kobe (1988), Sapporo (1988) and Chiba (1989). In addition to these area-based groups, the Japan Anti-Apartheid Women's Committee, established in 1986, engaged in activities to disseminate information about situations under which South African women were living. These various groups constituted the national network of the JAAC.

The forms of JAAC activism included (1) research, publications, and showing movies to raise public awareness, (2) denouncing and organizing protests against the Japanese government and firms that were doing business with/in South Africa, (3) calls for boycott of South African products, (4) building and maintaining networks with other movements within and outside Japan and (5) hosting events with various South African and international guest speakers, most notably the Anti-Apartheid Asia–Oceania Workshop in 1988 (Kusuhara 2010).

While loosely coalesced through an anti-apartheid cause, these local groups varied in types of activities and focus, reflecting the different backgrounds of members. JAAC Tokyo was officially one of the local groups affiliated with the JAAC, yet it played a central role in building and maintaining networks among JAAC affiliates as well as with other groups and organizations, and acted as the *de facto* representative of the entire JAAC in terms of international solidarity. JAAC Osaka on the other hand was characterized by its strong network with local human rights and anti-discrimination causes, such as Buraku³ liberation and discriminatory fingerprinting enforcement against local Korean residents (or “Zainichi Koreans” who had their roots in the Korean Peninsula under Japanese colonial rule), particularly in the late 1980s. The group in Kyoto mainly consisted of postgraduate and undergraduate university students and it placed importance on reading and translating English articles and books (including novels written by African writers); in Nagoya, in addition to the actions that were common in other groups, such as calls for boycotts, elements of alternative trade were included in its activities; and in Hiroshima, high school teachers took up the issue of the problematic content of social studies textbooks, which they thought were discriminatory and could further prejudice against African people.⁴

The JAAC’s call for a boycott of South African products resulted in the stoppage in 1988 by

³ See the website of the International Movement against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR) for an explanation about Buraku discrimination. ‘Buraku people are a Japanese social minority group, ethnically and linguistically indistinguishable from other Japanese people. They face discrimination in Japan because of an association with work once considered impure, such as butchering animals or tanning leather. In particular, they often have trouble finding marriage partners or employment.’ (<http://www.imadr.org/sayama/buraku.html>) IMADR is an international nongovernmental organization that was established by an initiative of the Buraku Liberation League; it played an active role in anti-apartheid activism in Japan in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

⁴ Author’s interviews with former members of the JAAC in Tokyo (October 2014), Osaka (November 2011), Nagoya (June 2015) and Hiroshima (July 2015).

several major supermarkets, including Jusco, Ito Yokado and Daiei, of selling South African products (mainly canned fruits, juice and wines). The campaign over Namibian uranium was another success; protest actions were organized against electric power companies, including the Kansai Electric Power Co., for importing uranium that allegedly originated from apartheid Namibia. This protest eventually succeeded in having the Minister for Trade and Industry at that time promise that ‘only uranium definitely not from Namibia may be purchased by electric power companies in the future’.⁵

On the other hand, the JAAC’s achievement in changing the attitude of the Japanese government towards South Africa was limited. Although the Japanese government repeatedly expressed that it was against apartheid, it was reluctant to implement effective economic sanctions, as a result of which it became the leading trading partner to South Africa in 1987. Only after it was criticized at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in December 1988 for its trade with South Africa, did the Japanese government make some serious effort to curb its trade with that country. The pressure from the JAAC might have helped to a certain extent, but the Japanese government was more sensitive to international criticism than to criticism from local social movements.

Framing Discourses of ‘Honorary White’

Anti-apartheid international solidarity was a transnational social movement. The JAAC, as part of the transnational network, shared many goals, values and strategies with activists abroad. As described above, the JAAC’s activities included calls for boycotting South African products and for economic sanctions against the apartheid regime; rallies to protest against apartheid and to show solidarity with the oppressed people in Southern Africa; and various activities to raise awareness among the general public, including publications, seminars, films, concerts and photo/art exhibitions, which were all common activities in anti-apartheid activism in other countries.

⁵ Minutes of the Lower House Committee on Trade and Industry (*Shoko Inikai*), House of Representatives, 9 November 1988, p. 17; author’s interview with Yoichi Mine, June 2015.

Yet activists in transnational social movements, while connected to one another across borders and learning from each other, are at the same time rooted in and influenced by domestic networks and politics (Tarrow 2011, ch.12). Therefore, focus and framing discourses can also vary, reflecting different national contexts. In the case of the JAAC, the most unique aspect was its focus on the issue of 'honorary white'. In the rest of this section, the origin and effect of the focus on the 'honorary white' issue in the JAAC will be explored.

In the afterword of the influential book *Sabetsu to Hangyaku no Genten*, Noma recalls how he and other representatives from Japan received strong criticism from the ANC representative at the AAPSO conference in Moshi, 1963, about the Japanese stance towards South Africa and were urged to launch action in Japan against apartheid:

The points made by South African representatives were as follows. The white government of South Africa is imposing a harsh oppressive policy, ignoring the human rights of non-white people. What do you think about the fact that Japan, despite being a non-white country, has foreign relations with South Africa and is strengthening trade ties with it, against the UN call for member countries to cut ties with and impose economic sanctions on South Africa? (Noma 1969, 381, author's translation)

This quote shows that, from the very beginning, the issue of Japan being a non-white nation but at the same time on the side of white supremacist South Africa was highlighted by the liberation movement leaders as the reason why the Japanese people should take action against apartheid. To cite another example, responding to the news of the formation of the JAAC in 1964, ANC London representative Mazisi (Raymond) Kunene sent a letter of appreciation in which he wrote:

Japan is one of the most important countries for advancing the anti-apartheid struggle. As you know, the South African government is finding Japan to be a new partner to penetrate into the African market [...] Is it not humiliating for the Japanese people that they are classified as European by the South African government just for the sake of

trade? For these reasons, it is essential for the Japanese people to take action against apartheid right now.⁶

Although the exact term ‘honorary white’ was not used in the quotes, it is clear that they were referring to the issue. ‘Honorary white’ or the treatment of Japanese as part of the European population in apartheid legislation was widely known both in Japan and South Africa by that time. This treatment has its origin in the ‘gentlemen’s agreement’ of 1930, but it was widely publicized after April 1961 when Jan de Klerk, the Minister of the Interior, stated in Parliament that ‘for the purpose of the Groups Areas Act members of the Japanese group are regarded and treated as members of the White group’ (Osada 2003, 46).⁷ In the aftermath of the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, South Africa received strong international criticism. Boycott campaigns started in several Western countries, and a call for economic and other sanctions against the apartheid regime was adopted at the UN General Assembly in 1962 (although it was non-binding). Amid such heightening criticism, Japan, which was hastily reconstructing its economy after its defeat in WWII, increased its trade with South Africa more than fivefold during the period 1960 to 1972 (Osada 2003, 47).

Japan was criticized all the more strongly for its increasingly close economic ties with South Africa because it was seeking a seat on the UN Security Council as ‘the representative of Asian and African countries’. The representative of Guinea was reported to have said ‘Japan would not win support from Asian and African countries in the UN Security Council elections unless it stands firmly against apartheid’.⁸ Due to the strong criticism from African countries, Japan almost failed to secure the seat in 1965. Here, Japan’s contradictory attitude in which it wished to be part of the Western/White world while at the same time it claimed a position to ‘represent’ Asia and Africa was questioned. The ‘honorary white’ status symbolized deceitful contradiction.

⁶ JAAC, *Nan’a Tsushin*, No. 2, 15 January 1964. Author’s translation.

⁷ For a fuller account of the history of “honorary white”, see Osada (2002) and Yamamoto (2012). Osada demonstrates that there was in fact no special treatment for Japanese people, but they were just treated in the same way as other non-white foreigners who were residing temporarily in South Africa. For the purpose of this paper, the widespread belief that only Japanese people were treated as such, and the sense of disgracefulness this belief produced among conscientious Japanese people, is more important than whether it was factual or not.

⁸ *Asahi Shimbun*, 11 December 1965. Author’s translation.

The concept of ‘honorary white’ had the potential to provoke a strong awareness that the issue of apartheid was related to the Japanese people. According to Akira Kusuhara, who was one of the founders of JAAC Tokyo and maintained a long-time commitment to its activism, his engagement in the anti-apartheid movement was heavily influenced by historian Senroku Uehara, who told him in 1964 that ‘the matter of freedom and liberation of South African black people is at the same time a matter of freedom and liberation of Japanese people’ (Kusuhara 1988, 191). Kusuhara also often cites what Mazisi Kunene said when he visited Japan in 1970: ‘Japan is killing us. Japanese prosperity depends upon our blood’ (Kusuhara 2015). The JAAC tended to emphasize Japanese responsibility for maintaining the apartheid regime and oppressing black people in South Africa. Japan was responsible for apartheid, it was argued, because Japan was helping prolonging its regime through trade relations with South Africa, in return for which the Japanese people were granted the unhonourable status of ‘honorary white’. In this way, Japan was not a non-party to the matter but had structural responsibility for the oppression of black South Africans.

As the issue of ‘honorary white’ originated from the economic relations between South Africa and Japan, the JAAC naturally took up the issue as an economic one in the first place to criticize Japanese firms doing business with South Africa and to criticize the Japanese government, which was supporting those firms’ business operations. In addition, the issue would also be seen as having cognitive or cultural aspects, i.e. the issue of a prejudiced perception of Africa and a racist mind set pervasive among the Japanese people. Following is an excerpt from an essay that a resident officer of a major Japanese trading house wrote for his company’s in-house magazine. These were exposed in 1970 in *News and Reports*, the annual publication of JAAC Tokyo:

As the trade between South Africa and Japan has rapidly increased over the past several years, ‘honorary whites’ are now becoming more substantiated ... Even though it is due to economic reasons, it is heartening that the Japanese people are increasingly highly regarded among white people in South Africa. We would like to continue our effort so that we can respond to their trust in us ... My impressions of each population group in my daily experiences are: Indians are shifty, Chinese are secluded, Coloureds are boorish

and ignorant and Black Africans are helpless and dumb.⁹

Responding to this blatant racist essay, JAAC Tokyo condemned the ‘reality of honorary whites, who are in other words honorary racists’, flattering white supremacist governments while discriminating against black people.¹⁰ In another issue of the JAAC Tokyo publication, an appeal was made that such racism was not a problem limited to the community of business people residing in South Africa, but efforts from each and every person in Japanese society to liberate themselves from being ‘honorary whites’ are necessary:

It was South African whites that gave us the status of ‘honorary white’, but it was we Japanese who made ourselves ‘honorary white’... We see the possibility for solidarity between us and non-white people in our action to try to liberate ourselves from being ‘honorary white’.¹¹

The ‘honorary white’ epithet was the key framing concept for the anti-apartheid movement in Japan. It both highlighted the Japanese government and business complicity in apartheid and at the same time encouraged ordinary citizens to mobilize against it *as their own problem*. Those who participated in JAAC activities were expected to critically self-reflect to be aware of their ignorance and unconscious prejudice and to transform themselves through learning the history and current affairs of South Africa and other parts of Africa from the African people’s perspective.

Along with the call for sanctions and boycotts (which were common in anti-apartheid activism in other countries), ‘No to honorary white’ became one of the important slogans for the JAAC and often featured in the publications of various JAAC groups. For instance, *News and Reports* No. 24 of JAAC Tokyo carried the title ‘South Africa as our own problem: No to ‘honorary white’; JAAC Osaka printed the slogan ‘We are against apartheid and reject the title of ‘honorary white’ at the bottom of every page of its monthly newsletter for the period from

⁹ JAAC Tokyo, *News and Reports*, No. 18, November 1975, p. 20. Author’s translation.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ JAAC Tokyo, *News and Reports*, No. 20, June 1977, pp. 65–67. Author’s translation.

August 1986 (No. 76) to November 1989 (No. 95). By framing apartheid as an issue having a direct link to Japanese society, the JAAC's focus on 'honorary white' mobilized among its participants a continuous commitment and sense of solidarity with black people in South Africa who fought against apartheid.

Conclusion: Some Reflections from Comparative Perspective

Despite shared goals, values, and strategies, international solidarity actions against apartheid took different forms in different places. In the United Kingdom as well as the Nordic countries, where many exiles and students from Southern Africa resided for decades, solidarity actions were organized mainly to give direct support to liberation movements, particularly the ANC. In the case of the British Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM), its 'single issue' approach prevented it from fully facing the problem of racism at home (Fieldhouse 2005, 345-351); in Sweden, too, to a lesser extent, anti-apartheid groups were criticized for similar reasons.¹² In Japan, in contrast, where personal contacts with liberation movements were limited until the late 1980s when an ANC representative began to be stationed in Tokyo, anti-apartheid activism tended to focus on transforming their own society.

The establishment of an ANC office in Japan was quite late; it was in 1988 when the ANC opened its office in Tokyo with Jerry Matjila as its representative. As a *shimin undo*, the JAAC deliberately avoided special relations with any political parties or political organizations, and notably, the ANC was not an exception. The JAAC treated the ANC and PAC equally, and the philosophy of Black Consciousness was very popular among Japanese anti-apartheid activists. At the Anti-apartheid Asia Oceania Workshop in 1988, which was one of the largest events the JAAC ever organized with financial assistance from the United Nations, the JAAC invited not only ANC but also PAC representatives, which provoked dissatisfaction on the side of the ANC. In turn, the speech Matjila made at the workshop made JAAC members unhappy, since he argued that apartheid should be given the top priority among various discrimination issues

¹² Author's interview with Tor Sellstrom, August 2015.

(JAAC 1989, 179). This was problematic because, from the JAAC's point of view, the foundation of international solidarity between Japanese and South African people was their common experience of human rights and discrimination problems, and therefore the JAAC's presentation at the workshop dealt with issues such as discrimination against Buraku and Zainichi Korean people.

The focus on the issue of 'honorary white' arguably promoted this tendency to emphasize the importance of problems within Japanese society. The JAAC presented a frame that apartheid was not just a problem in a remote country; it was a problem in Japanese society which was of a discriminatory and racist nature. This frame of apartheid as 'our own problem' also encouraged anti-apartheid activists to collaborate with other citizens' movements which tackled human rights issues within Japan including the discrimination against Buraku people and the Zainichi Korean minority. Such collaboration enabled broader mobilization for the anti-apartheid cause, and vice versa, yet it softened the 'single issue' focus on apartheid, which caused tension with the ANC, as was discussed above.

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